

A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

(Miketz)

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality
From Rav Binny and Yonatan Freedman

It was late, and normally he would have been on his way home but he had some unfinished business at work, bringing him back up the hill late that night.

Very few people would even have noticed what he saw, much less done anything about it, but to Aryeh, who was both an expert in archeology, as well as very familiar with the normal comings and goings in East Jerusalem, something was clearly going on.

As he headed up the hill from his home in Ir David (a Jewish neighborhood in the valley below today's modern Old City walls, which marks the site where King David and his men first conquered Jerusalem three thousand years ago) towards the Dung gate and the Kotel (Western Wall), a long line of trucks was moving up and down the road, in and out of the Old City.

Arabs do not normally work late at night and certainly so many trucks would have to mean a major building project, which was strange considering the late hour. Suddenly, his heart racing, he realized this many trucks could only mean one thing. Half running up the hill, he headed towards the Lion's gate on the eastern side of the Old City.

The Lion's gate, where in 1967 Israel's paratroopers had stormed into the Old City, ending two thousand years of foreign occupation and restoring an ancient city to its ancient people, was also the only gate wide enough to accommodate trucks of this size, and this many trucks heading in and out of there could only mean one thing: they had to connected to the work the Arabs were doing on the Temple Mount!

Could these trucks be taking archeological treasures from the Temple Mount?

For thirty years, ever since 1967, Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan had given control of the Temple Mount over to the Wakf (the Muslim religious authority) in the wake of the Six Day War, an ongoing theological and historical battle had been going on concerning Jews' rights to the Mount and the historical veracity of their claims that this mountain had been the site of the Temple (known as the Beit HaMikdash) a full fifteen hundred years before the seventh- century birth of Islam.

Some Arabs (most notably Yasser Arafat, as head of the Palestinian Authority following the Oslo accords) had gone as far as saying the Temple had never existed and that all claims to Jewish history on the Temple Mount were a complete fabrication.

Due to its sensitive religious nature, no archeological dig has ever been allowed on the Temple Mmount, at least in modern memory, but rumors were rampant that the Muslims were expanding the lower level of the Mosque of Omar (also known as the El Aksa mosque, on the southern side of the Temple mount) in a hall known for obvious reasons as Solomon's Stables, and Aryeh was wondering if all these trucks could have something to do with that.

Technically, such building projects were illegal unless properly approved, but if these trucks meant what he thought they did, that fact did not seem to have made an impression on the Wakf.

He frantically began calling every reporter he could think of, but imagine getting a call at midnight from a frantic un-known voice that dozens of trucks were coming in and out of the Old City; would you get out of bed?

Finally a Channel two reporter with an interest in archeology decided to check it out and at 12:30AM arrived at the Lion's gate with a camera crew; clearly, something was going on.

Immediately, Aryeh suggested he follow the trucks as far as he could get inside the Old City, and he himself raced back to get his car and follow the trucks heading out of the Old City; where were they going, and what were they doing?

His discovery which has now become a famous and a matter of public record was nothing short of an archeological, historical earthquake.

The Muslims digging out the Solomon's Stables area needed to figure out what to do with all the dirt they were digging up; after all, huge piles of dirt on the Temple Mount would be clear evidence that they were digging....

So, with a few greased palms and heads turned the other way, fifty trucks, over a period of nearly a month, simply dumped at least fifty (and some say as much as two hundred!) tons of earth, in at least three separate garbage sites in East Jerusalem.

Imagine: Earth that has been untouched since the Romans burned the second Temple two thousand years ago was dug up and simply dumped in valleys in the middle of the night!

Of course, one person's garbage dump is another's treasure trove, and while much of the damage done and history lost can never be recovered, what has been discovered is nothing short of incredible.

In a valley in East Jerusalem, an archeological dig has been set up and volunteers from all over the world, under the guidance of Israeli archeologists, have been sifting through three thousand years of history.

Among the finds: a Babylonian Arrowhead dated nearly twenty five hundred years ago, from the Babylonian conquest of the first Temple, and a twenty-six hundred year old Seal (clay stamp used to seal letters) with the Hebrew letters '...liahu (Was this Eliahu? Chilkiahu?) & the family name of IMER (Aleph, Mem Reish), a priestly (Kohanim) family name mentioned in the bible as serving in the Temple during the first Temple period!

Can you imagine? The Muslim Wakf's desire to erase Jewish history, allowed Israeli archeologists to rediscover a part of our past we never dared dream we could explore!

And you can visit this valley in East Jerusalem (as we did with an Isralight Mission a few weeks ago), and hold these stones and artifacts in your hand!

All of which leaves one wondering: how do hundreds of millions of Muslims continue to deny what is now so obviously historical fact?

Is it a conscious decision to deny the truth? Or can so many people really convince themselves that what seems so obviously to be the case as the existence of an ancient Jewish State in what is today the state of Israel be impossible?

Make no mistake about it: this question is not limited to any one particular ethnicity, religion, or theology. How do tens (hundreds?) of thousands of people still believe the Holocaust never happened? And how are there still people in the world that believe that Stalin was a savior to the poor people of the world?

For that matter, how do people look at the same scenario and see completely different realities? How is it that so many people living in Gush Katif (in the Gaza strip) facing thirty thousand soldiers and policemen still believe, that the disengagement would never happen while others could not understand why it took so long? Or, from the other end of the political spectrum, how, nearly fifteen years and countless terrorist attacks, missile launches, and suicide (homicide) bombers after Oslo can some people remain convinced that Oslo could have and still might work, while others view it as the greatest calamity since the Holocaust?

To be sure, our purpose is not to take a particular political position, but rather to question how it is that we seem to become so ensconced in the positions we have taken.

This week's portion, *Miketz*, and its place in the story of Joseph and his brothers, presents us with a fascinating perspective on this question.

Perhaps a bit of Biblical background is in order:

Sold by his brothers into slavery some twenty years earlier, Joseph, who has now taken the Egyptian name *Tzofnat-Paneach*, has, by Divine design, been elevated to the grand position of Viceroy of Egypt, the second most powerful position, in the most powerful empire the world had ever known.

In the midst of a devastating famine caused by drought, the entire region has become dependant on the Nile-river based Egyptian economy, and the only food to be found is being controlled and doled out by none other than Joseph himself.

In the course of time, the same brothers are forced to come to Egypt in search of grain, and soon find themselves accused of being spies, standing before no less than the Viceroy himself, who unbeknownst to them, is the same Joseph they mercilessly sold into slavery all those years ago.

Sounds like a great Hollywood movie, right? It gets better! Joseph is presented with an incredible opportunity: the chance for a most delicious payback. But revenge does not seem to be on his mind (else he would have had them all thrown into a pit...) and instead he orchestrates a series of puzzling events that allow the brothers to re-live the same opportunity they missed when Joseph was in the pit; the chance to put their younger, seemingly more favored brother (by their father Ya'acov) before them.

First, Joseph ascertains that these brothers (who according to rabbinic legend in the *Midrash* gave Joseph the 'excuse' to accuse them of espionage by entering the city separately despite obviously (because they alone all looked to be 'Hebrews'?), claim to have a younger brother they have left at home, and then he takes one of their lot (Shimon) prisoner, warning he will not be released, nor will they be allowed to return for more food until they bring their brother Binyamin (Benjamin) back with them.

Then, just when they are finally leaving their brother Shimon behind in Egypt with heavy hearts (Shimon was the brother who instigated the massacre of the city of *Shechem* after the rape of Dinah; perhaps they would remain true to color and simply abandon him in Egypt?) they open their packs on the road to discover all the money they were meant to have paid (for the Egyptian Grain they were carrying) still in their possession. Are they being set up? Will they be accused of theft from the Egyptian crown (a crime punishable by death)?

“...Vayomer el achiv: hushav kaspi, ve’gam hineh be’amtachti; va’yetze’ libam vayechedu’ ish el achiv laimor: ma zot asah Elokim lanu?”

“...And he said to his brother, my money has been returned and behold it is in my pack; and their hearts went out and they trembled, one to his brother saying: what is this G-d has done to us?” (Genesis (Bereishit) 42:28)

Clearly, the brothers see this as no less than a calamity. The thought that the mightiest empire on the face of the Earth, the personification of evil that was ancient Egypt might now be hunting them is clearly cause for concern.

And yet, interestingly enough, they immediately seem to question no less than G-d himself! ‘How could Hashem (G-d) do this to us?’ is the question that immediately escapes their lips.

Now to be sure, one could view this question as the faith-filled desire to place any seemingly challenging event in front of the lens of Divine Omnipotence. In other words, one might assume they are accepting this new challenge as G-d’s will and are merely accepting their own responsibility to try and understand what G-d really wants of us. True faith, after all, implies that everything that comes your way has a reason, right? And in that case, ‘ours is not to reason why, ours but to do or die’, correct?

Not my job to figure why I may be having a hard time, mine is only the challenge to decide what I think I am meant to do with it: what do I think Hashem wants of me?

Noble to be sure, but hardly in keeping with the “*trembling*” and clear anxiety the brothers display here. If you really believe Hashem is running the world and everything has a purpose, shouldn’t the first assumption be there must be something about *me* and *my life* that warrants this situation?

And especially in the case of Joseph’s brothers who quite clearly still have guilt over having sold their brother into slavery years earlier, one would imagine they might consider this to be warranted due to their past behavior, instead of immediately questioning G- d?

Even more questionable however, is not what the brothers do but consider, but rather what they don’t.

Recall, that while Ya’acov assumes his long lost son Joseph is dead, the brothers know he was sold and have every reason to assume he might well be alive, and even advising or serving someone who might be connected to the bizarre series of events that surround their foray to Egypt.

One wonders then why it never occurs to the brothers that Joseph might be connected to the events at hand. Is it not curious that of all the tens of thousands of people coming to Egypt for food, these ten brothers find themselves brought before no less than the Viceroy himself?

And how is it that when they are brought before Joseph none of them recognize their own brother whose face (being sold into slavery) must still haunt their dreams?

And why is this Viceroy so interested in their father Ya’acov constantly asking if he is still alive? Why does this not arouse the brothers’ curiosity?

And then there is the astounding similarity of events to the cause of the selling of Joseph in the first place? All those years ago, Joseph tells the family of his dream that the brothers’ bushels are bowing to his, and that the moon, the sun and the stars are bowing before him, and this so outrages the brothers, it pushes them over the edge, causing them to nearly kill (and actually sell as a slave) their brother. Is this

not a moment one would expect to be carried in their collective consciousness? And yet, here they are, bowing down together before a ruler they ought never to have met, and they do not even question whether Joseph might be involved?

And as if this is not enough, why would an Egyptian ruler who represents the ancient equivalent of a Nazi Reichsführer accuse them of espionage, a charge with almost no basis, and then essentially let them go, simply to bring their brother back?

How is it that this Egyptian ruler who commands such a high position in the world center of pagan idolatry would say nonetheless:

“et ha'Elokim ani yareh” , *“I fear G-d”* (See 42: 15-20)?

To top it all off, when the brothers return to Egypt with Binyamin, and are invited to the Viceroy's home for a feast (Genesis chap. 43), they are inexplicably seated in the precise order of their birth which, while causing the brothers to 'wonder' (42: 33), incredibly does not cause any of them to think Joseph might have something to do with it! Well, how on earth else would the Viceroy know the order of their birth?!

(Indeed the Talmud (tractate *Chullin* 91a) suggests on the verse (43:16):

“Tavoach tevach ve'hachen”, *“Slaughter the animal and prepare it”*, that Joseph instructs his staff to prepare the feasts for the brothers, that they ritually slaughtered it and removed the sciatic nerve (the *gid hanasheh*, a family (Jewish?) custom dating back to Yaacov's struggle with Eisav) in front of them. But how would the Egyptians know about this custom?)

Yet, despite all of these indications, the brothers just go on about their business never questioning all of these events!

In fact, despite having discovered the money in their packs on their last journey from Egypt, and despite their horror and despair in that moment, they nonetheless buy their grain and take their packs, never checking to make sure they are only holding grain nor checking the bags to be sure nothing is 'planted' in them, as such allowing not only all their money to be again returned, but the goblet of no less than the Viceroy himself to end up in their bag!

How do they not wonder how such a valuable object as a goblet which would cause the kings' men to chase them all the way from Egypt, ended up in Binyamin's pack?

Finally, despite all these clues, the brothers are still speechless with shock when Joseph finally reveals himself to them. Why is this so shocking? Why did not a single one of them see this coming at all?

Are we missing something? One doesn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to see something is awry with this story! So what is really going on here?

There is, perhaps, one thought that might go a long way towards explaining this inexplicable lack of perception the brothers seem to display and which may as well be part of the underlying message of this entire story.

Maybe the issue is not the events they should see now, but rather the actions they performed then, and the impact those actions continue to have on the way they see things now.

The Torah (*Shemot* (Exodus) 23:8) makes a point of saying, in discussing the prohibition against bribery of a judge:

“...*Ki hashochad ye’aver pikchim...*”

“...*For bribery blinds the eyes of the wise.*”

An interesting choice of words; why does bribery **blind** the wise, instead of merely making it more difficult to see? After all, it’s not as though a bribed judge cannot see truth and justice at all, it’s just that their sight is now warped, or tainted, no?

In fact, though, the Torah may well be suggesting that the bribed judge is no longer capable of seeing truthfully. No matter how clear justice might be, bribery warps his vision to the extent that he no longer is capable of seeing things the way they really are.

And this, perhaps, is the brothers’ undoing. A long time ago they made an assumption, that Joseph’s motivations were impure, that he was simply after the birthright, and that perhaps ego and greed were coloring his actions and flavoring his dreams.

The result of that assumption was the righteous indignation that led to their selling of their own brother as a slave. Incredibly, twenty years later, in suggesting that perhaps all these terrible events were occurring to them because:

“...*ve’lo shamanu’ eilav be’hitchaneno’ eileinu...*”

“...*we did not hear (listen to) him when he beseeched us...*”

the brothers never suggest they were actually wrong to sell him, but merely are pained they were not more moved by their brother’s pain! Despite it all, they still think they were justified in selling him! It is still a legitimate course of action in their eyes, because to accept that Joseph was actually a *tzaddik*, means that their entire lives have been a lie and that everything they did was wrong. And that is a very difficult thing to do.

To actually recognize that the assumption which forms the core of a person’s entire life journey could be completely mistaken and that my entire life might be built on false premises takes an enormous amount of strength and great inner resolve, not to mention character.

Rare is the individual who is prepared to make such an admission, but this perhaps, is the level the Torah wants us to aspire to reach, in unraveling before us the human drama that is the story of Joseph and his brothers.

Indeed, four thousand years later, Adlerian psychology will base its theories of self correction on the discovery of a basic flaw which is essentially an assumption often arrived at early in life, usually as the result of some form of trauma, that is the root of all the mistakes a person struggles with in his or her life.

(For example, a person who does not seem capable of maintaining a serious relationship long enough to commit to marriage, might discover in therapy that he grew up watching his parents in an unhappy marriage and came to the flawed subconscious conclusion that marriage inevitably makes you unhappy. It goes without saying if you subconsciously think marriage makes you unhappy, it’s no wonder you can’t seem to get married! And once you realize this is your basic mistake, and recognize it as such, you can correct it and discover happiness in a relationship....)

Despite all the obvious signs, the brothers simply cannot see the obvious solution to the mystery that confronts them. To do so is to admit that the dream has come true, and that they are in fact bowing to their own brother, and that would mean they were wrong, and their lives have been based on a completely flawed assumption.

] And if Joseph is a *tzaddik*, then they are the villains, which is a very hard conclusion to draw.

We need look no farther than today's newspapers to find this lesson all around us.

If Oslo was a failure, because we had no real partners, then that would mean all the death and violence since then was the result of that failure and we need to completely change directions, and that is a very hard pill to swallow. Far easier to keep trying the same experiment, no matter how strange that may seem, than admit such far-reaching errors.

And if the disengagement really means the majority of the Israeli public could care less about eight thousand people and their land amongst the Arabs, then that might mean *Gush Emunim's* entire policy of populating land as opposed to educating people might be completely mistaken, and that might mean thirty years of mistaken decisions, which is an equally difficult pill to swallow if true.

Indeed, these are examples are on a national level, but this suggestion is just as applicable in our personal day to day lives.

If I am miserable as a lawyer because I chose the field for the wrong reasons then I might need to accept twenty years of mistakes, in order to make life better. And if the fellow or relative I am angry at actually had a point, then I might need to accept that I have been walking a path of behavior based on a completely mistaken assumption....

This may be one reason why this portion of *Miketz* always falls on the Shabbat of Chanukah: because this is the essence of what Chanukah was all about.

Too many Jews were living lives based on Greek assumptions that from a Jewish perception were completely flawed. And that may be why the festival of Chanukah is all about lighting the Menorah, because the solution to correcting flawed assumptions, is to hold them up to the light of impartial analysis, the light of objective truth, which from a Jewish perspective is the ancient and ever beautiful light of Torah.

Indeed, on Chanukah the Temple was not destroyed and rebuilt, it had simply become polluted by Greek idolatry and paganism. So the Macabees cleaned up and re-dedicated it; hence the name Chanukah, related to the word *chen*, or inner beauty. Chanukah is about looking deep inside us to rediscover the inner beauty that was always there; the beauty that shone forth before our mistaken assumptions clouded them over and hid them away.

This year, may we have the wisdom to discover our mistakes, the strength to correct them and the courage to change our ways and paths, opinions and perspectives, to live up to those new assumptions.

Best wishes for a wonderful Chanukah, full of joy and light for all people everywhere,

Shabbat Shalom,

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